

WORKING WITH CRYSTAL METH USING OFFENDERS

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INTRODUCTION:-

IN 2007 I VISITED WESTERN AUSTRALIA TO ATTEND A FAMILY WEDDING AND WHILST THERE I CALLED IN TO SEE THE LOCAL COURT DRUG TEAM TO COMPARE NOTES. I HAVE WORKED AT THE MAGISTRATES COURT IN MANCHESTER SINCE 1988, INITIALLY FOR PROBATION AND LATTERLY FOR MANCHESTER DRUG SERVICE. I WAS TOLD THAT THE BIGGEST PROBLEM THEY HAD AT THAT TIME IN WA WAS CRYSTAL METH, A DRUG THAT WAS NOT VERY PREVALENT IN THE UK. ON MY RETURN HOME I WAS SAT AT MY DESK TRAWLING THROUGH THE INTERNET AND CAME ACROSS AN ADVERT FOR THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST OFFERING FUNDING FOR PEOPLE TO TRAVEL AND LOOK AT WORK THAT WOULD ASSIST THEM IN THEIR CAREERS AND BE OF USE TO THEIR COMMUNITY. I HAD A LITTLE TIME AVAILABLE SO I COMPLETED AN APPLICATION AND SENT IT OFF, GIVING MYSELF LITTLE CHANCE OF SUCCESS. TO MY GREAT SURPRISE I WAS INVITED DOWN TO LONDON FOR INTERVIEW AND EVENTUALLY WAS INFORMED I HAD BEEN SUCCESSFUL.

I THEN CONTACTED THE DRUG TEAM AT PERTH MAGISTRATES COURT AND ASKED IF THEY COULD OFFER ME A PLACEMENT TO WHICH THEY REPLIED THEY WOULD

MY NEXT TASK WAS TO ARRANGE TIME OFF FROM WORK. A BIT DIFFICULT AS OUT OF A TEAM OF 3, ONE HAD BEEN RETIRED AND THE OTHER MOVED TO ANOTHER BASE IT TOOK NEARLY 9 MONTHS FOR A NEW COLLEAGUE TO BE APPOINTED. SO I FINALLY LEFT THE UK IN NOVEMBER 2008 TO SPEND 6 WEEKS WITH THE COURT ASSESSMENT AND TREATMENT TEAM IN PERTH.

JOURNEY AND ARRIVAL:-

I HAD A LITTLE PROBLEM AT MANCHESTER AIRPORT WITH MY VISA. APPARENTLY THE COMPUTER SHOWED I HAD BEEN REFUSED ONE BUT ALSO SHOWED I HAD BEEN ACCEPTED. THEY MANAGED TO SORT IT OUT AND I LEFT MANCHESTER IN TEMPERATURES OF LESS THAN 0%. FOLLOWING A COUPLE OF HOURS

STOPOVER IN SINGAPORE I ARRIVED IN PERTH TO TEMPERATURES IN THE MID 20s. MY SISTER WHO MET ME WAS COMPLAINING THAT, WHAT I THOUGHT A PLEASANT BREEZE WAS MAKING IT FREEZING. SHE HAD A LONG SLEEVE TOP AND TROUSERS ON, I WAS IN SHORTS, T-SHIRT AND THONGS (FLIP FLOPS) AND THE SWEAT WAS POURING OFF ME!!

THE FIRST DAY I WENT ON AN EXPLORING EXPEDITION TO TIME MY JOURNEY INTO PERTH CITY AND TO MAKE SURE I KNEW WHERE I WAS GOING.

FIRST DAY AT WORK:-

I ARRIVED AT THE COURT ASSESSMENT TEAM (CATS) OFFICE AND MET THE TEAM MANAGER SARA. SHE TOOK ME ROUND AND INTRODUCED ME TO THE REST OF THE TEAM AND GAVE ME A QUICK OUTLINE OF THE WORK. I THEN WENT TO THE COURTS TO OBSERVE HOW THE DEDICATED DRUG COURT OPERATED.

THE FIRST THING THAT STRUCK ME WAS THE INFORMALITY OF IT ALL. DEFENDANTS AND THEIR FAMILIES, INCLUDING YOUNG CHILDREN WERE SAT AT THE SIDE OF COURT WEARING SHORTS, T-SHIRTS AND DRINKING FROM BOTTLES OF WATER. THIS WOULD JUST NOT BE TOLERATED IN MANCHESTER. AS A CONTRAST HOWEVER EVERYONE STOOD AND BOWED WHEN THE MAGISTRATE CAME IN TO COURT AND ALSO BOWED WHEN THEY ENTERED OR LEFT THE COURT ROOM WHAT I THEN NOTICED WAS THAT ALL THE WORKERS IN THE COURT (MAGISTRATE, PROSECUTION, CATS WORKER, LAWYERS AND THE USHER) SEEMED TO KNOW EACH DEFENDANT VERY WELL AND CONSTANT REFERENCE WAS MADE BY THE MAGISTRATE TO WHAT HAD HAPPENED AT THE PREVIOUS APPEARANCE.

DEDICATED DRUG COURT:-

THIS HAD BEEN OPERATING IN PERTH FOR ABOUT 5 YEARS BEFORE MY ARRIVAL AND WAS COMPLETELY DIFFERENT TO ANYTHING I HAD HEARD OF OPERATING IN THE UK.

IF A DEFENDANT, THROUGH HIS LAWYER TOLD THE NORMAL MAGISTRATE COURT THAT THE OFFENCE(S) FOR WHICH THEY WERE APPEARING WERE DIRECTLY RELATED TO DRUG MISUSE THEY COULD ASK FOR A REFERRAL TO THE DRUG COURT. THEY HAD TO INDICATE A GUILTY PLEA TO ALL ALLEGATIONS AND NOT HAVE ANYTHING ELSE OUTSTANDING. THEY WOULD THEN ATTEND AT THE DRUG COURT EARLY THE FOLLOWING MONDAY WHEN WHAT WOULD BE EXPECTED OF THEM AND WHAT HELP THEY COULD EXPECT TO RECEIVE IF THEY WERE ACCEPTED BY THE COURT. THIS WAS FOLLOWED BY A HEARING TO SEE IF THEY WERE TO BE DEEMED ACCEPTABLE FOR A

SUITABILITY ASSESSMENT TO TAKE PLACE. THIS COULD BE ADVERSARIAL IF THE PROSECUTION FELT THAT THERE WAS ANYTHING KNOWN ABOUT THE DEFENDANT, SUCH AS VIOLENCE ON THE PREVIOUS CONVICTIONS IF NECESSARY THE DEFENCE WOULD PUT FORWARD COUNTER ARGUMENTS, THE CATS WORKER WOULD BE ASKED IF THEY HAD A VIEW AND THEN THE MAGISTRATE WOULD DECIDE ON THE DEFENDANT'S SUITABILITY. PERHAPS AT THIS POINT I OUGHT TO EXPLAIN THAT THE PROSECUTORS IN PERTH MAGISTRATES WERE ALL SERVING POLICE OFFICERS ESPECIALLY TRAINED TO PROSECUTE, THE MAGISTRATE WAS A TRAINED LAWYER (WHAT WE WOULD CALL A DISTRICT JUDGE IN THE UK) ANOTHER POINT OF INTEREST IS THAT THE SAME MAGISTRATE SITS IN THE DRUG COURT EACH DAY, THE PROSECUTORS ARE FROM A SMALL TEAM OF OFFICERS, THE LEGAL AID SOCIETY APPOINT LAWYERS TO SPECIFICALLY SERVICE THE COURT, EVEN THE USHER IS THE SAME ONE ON MOST DAYS. THIS IS THE REASON WHY EVERYONE SEEMED TO KNOW EACH DEFENDANT AS I MENTIONED EARLIER.

IF A PERSON WAS DEEMED ACCEPTABLE FOR ASSESSMENT THEY WOULD BE BAILED WITH A NUMBER OF "PROTECTIVE BAIL CONDITIONS" THESE NORMALLY INCLUDED A RESIDENCE CONDITION, LINKED TO A CURFEW, WHICH WAS SUBJECT TO POLICE CHECKS WHERE THE DEFENDANT HAD TO PRESENT THEMSELVES TO THE POLICE AT THEIR FRONT DOOR IF REQUESTED AND ALSO ONE NOT TO USE ANY "CASH CONVERTER" OR SIMILAR STORE WITHOUT THE PRIOR PERMISSION OF THE PROSECUTOR. THEY ALSO HAD TO ATTEND AT THE CATS OFFICE 3 TIMES A WEEK TO GIVE A URINE SAMPLE WHICH WOULD BE CHECKED FOR ILLEGAL DRUGS AND TO OBEY ALL LAWFUL REQUESTS OF THE CATS TEAM. THE BAIL PERIOD WOULD BE FOR 4 WEEKS AND WHEN THEY RETURNED THE CATS TEAM WOULD GIVE A REPORT AS TO THEIR SUITABILITY FOR THE DRUG COURT REGIME. IF THE DECISION WAS IN FAVOUR OF ACCEPTANCE THE MAGISTRATE WOULD THEN SET A PERIOD OF IMPRISONMENT WHICH WOULD BE SUSPENDED WHILST THE DEFENDANT WAS SUBJECT TO THE REGIME. SHE WOULD ALSO SET A NUMBER OF POINTS, A MAXIMUM OF 20 WHICH THE DEFENDANT HAD TO STAY UNDER IF THEY WERE TO RETAIN THEIR LIBERTY. POINTS WERE AWARDED AGAINST THEM IF THEY MISSED AN APPOINTMENT WITH THE CATS TEAM OR PRODUCED A "DIRTY" URINE SAMPLE. DURING THE CURRENCY OF THE REGIME A DEFENDANT COULD CHOOSE TO GO TO CUSTODY FOR A MAXIMUM OF 7 DAYS AND WOULD HAVE THE NUMBER OF POINTS DEDUCTED FOR EACH DAY SPENT INSIDE. THEY COULD ONLY MAKE THIS CHOICE ONCE WHILE ON THE REGIME. THE DEFENDANT IS BAILED TO RETURN TO COURT EACH WEEK FOR A REVIEW OF THEIR PROGRESS.

ANOTHER THING THAT IMPRESSED ME A LOT WAS THE WAY EVERYONE WORKING IN THE DRUG COURT CONSIDERED THEMSELVES PART OF THE SAME TEAM. THEY ALL HAD THE SAME TARGET, TO REDUCE DRUG RELATED CRIME, THERE WERE NO ISSUES OF CONFIDENTIALITY AND I FOUND THIS A REFRESHING CHANGE FROM THE UK WHERE EACH DEPARTMENT WORKING

IN THE CRIMINAL JUSTICE SYSTEM HAS DIFFERENT KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS WHICH OFTEN OPERATE IN DIRECT OPPOSITION TO EACH OTHER.

REVIEW MEETINGS:-

THESE ARE HELD EACH WEEK AND ALL THE DRUG COURT TEAM ATTEND. AT THE MEETING THE POINTS TO BE AWARDED AGAINST EACH CLIENT APPEARING IN THE NEXT WEEK IS REVIEWED AND IN MOST CASES DECIDED UPON. COMING FROM THE UK I FOUND THIS A LITTLE UNSETTLING AS DECISIONS WERE BEING MADE ABOUT PEOPLE WITHOUT THEM BEING PRESENT AND IF THEY WERE NOT REPRESENTED BY THE LEGAL AID LAWYER BUT A PRIVATE ONE, WITHOUT REPRESENTATION. WHEN I QUERIED THIS I WAS TOLD THAT IF THE DECISION WAS NOT ACCEPTED IT COULD BE ARGUED ABOUT IN COURT BUT I GOT THE IMPRESSION THAT THE DECISION WAS RARELY, IF EVER, OVERTURNED.

DRUG TESTS:-

AS STATED ABOVE DRUG COURT CLIENTS HAVE TO ATTEND 3 TIMES A WEEK AT THE CATS OFFICE TO PROVIDE A URINE SAMPLE. THESE ARE TEMPERATURE CHECKED ON THE SPOT TO ENSURE SOMEONE ELSE'S URINE HAS NOT BEEN PROVIDED TO PRODUCE A CLEAN SAMPLE. IF THE TEMPERATURE IS OK THE SAMPLE IS THEN SENT OFF FOR FURTHER ANALYSIS. NO EXCUSE IS ACCEPTED FOR "DIRTY" SAMPLES. AN EXCUSE OFTEN USED IN THE UK IS MEDICATION, MOST PAIN KILLERS ARE OPIATE BASED, BUT IN PERTH A CLIENT IS GIVEN A LIST OF MEDICATION TO PASS ONTO THEIR GP SO THAT THEY ARE NOT PRESCRIBED THESE. AT THE WEEKLY REVIEW APPEARANCE THE COURT IS REMINDED OF THE LATEST DRUG TESTS AND THE CATS WORKER IS CONNECTED BY COMPUTER TO THE OFFICE BASE SO ANY OUTSTANDING ONES CAN BE REPORTED ON.

RELATIONSHIPS:-

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE CATS WORKER AND THEIR CLIENT WAS OFTEN VERY CLOSE AND SEEMED BUILT ON TRUST. I WITNESSED A CLIENT RING HIS WORKER FROM HOME TO SAY HIS LIFE HAD GONE COMPLETELY OFF THE RAILS AND HE WAS GOING TO KILL HIMSELF. THE WORKER KEPT HIM TALKING WHILE A COLLEAGUE RANG HIS FATHER AT WORK AND ASKED HIM TO RETURN HOME IMMEDIATELY, WHICH HE DID. I THOUGHT THIS WAS AN EXCELLENT PROFESSIONAL PIECE OF WORK AND WHAT IMPRESSED ME WAS THE CLIENT RINGING HIS WORKER AT THIS TIME OF GREAT EMOTIONAL

STRESS TO SAY WHAT HE WAS PLANNING TO DO. A SUCCESSFUL OUTCOME AS THE CLIENT MANAGED, WITH SUPPORT TO GET HIS LIFE BACK ON TRACK AND WHEN I LEFT PERTH WAS AGAIN COOPERATING WITH THE DRUG COURT REGIME.

DETOXIFICATION AND REHABILITATION:-

ANOTHER ADVANTAGE THAT WA HAS OVER THE UK IS THE AVAILABILITY OF BEDS IN DETOX AND REHAB UNITS. I VISITED ONE DETOX CENTRE AND 2 RESIDENTIAL REHAB ESTABLISHMENTS AND ALTHOUGH EACH HAD A SLIGHTLY DIFFERENT APPROACH BOTH SEEMED PRETTY SUCCESSFUL IN HELPING CLIENTS IN ACHIEVING SOBRIETY.

RACISM:-

ONE ISSUE I HAD WITH THE DETOX CENTRE WAS WE WERE BEING SHOWN ROUND BY THE MANAGER AND SHE SAID “THIS IS THE MAINSTREAM WARD AND THIS IS THE ABORIGINE WARD”. ONE OF THE WORKERS IN THE CATS TEAM WAS ABORIGINAL AND I ASKED HER HOW THAT FELT, NOT BEING CONSIDERED PART OF THE MAINSTREAM. SHE THOUGHT FOR A MINUTE AND SAID “YOU’RE RIGHT MIKE BUT THAT KIND OF LANGUAGE IS SO COMMONPLACE I DON’T THINK ABOUT IT ANYMORE”. I FOUND THAT WORRYING. ANOTHER TIME I WAS INVITED TO A MEETING AND ONE OF THE AGENDA ITEMS WAS ABOUT A PROPOSAL TO MAKE AVAILABLE TO ABORIGINAL CLIENTS THE OPPORTUNITY TO HAVE A “RESPECTED ELDER” FROM THEIR COMMUNITY TO ACT AS A MENTOR FOR THEM WHILE THEY WERE ON THE DRUG COURT REGIME. THE REASON FOR THIS WAS SAID TO BE THE LOW TAKE UP OF THE COURT DRUG REGIME BY THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY AND THE LOW SUCCESS RATE OF THOSE WHO WERE ADMITTED TO IT. THE IDEA WAS FOR THE MENTOR TO ENCOURAGE THE CLIENT TO COOPERATE AND TO EXPLAIN TO THE COURT CULTURAL DIFFERENCES THAT MIGHT MAKE THE COOPERATION DIFFICULT. THIS, ON THE SURFACE SEEMED LAUDABLE BUT I ASKED WHERE THE IMPETUS FOR THIS HAD COME FROM, THE MEETING OR THE INDIGENOUS COMMUNITY ITSELF I WAS TOLD FROM THE MEETING. I FOUND THAT TO BE OF CONCERN AND COULD BE CONSIDERED PATRONISING. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN BETTER IF THE MEMBERS OF THE MEETING HAD APPROACHED THE ABORIGINAL COMMUNITY AND ASKED WHAT THEY THOUGHT WERE THE OBSTACLES TO THEIR PEOPLE TAKING UP AND SUCCESSFULLY COMPLETING THE REGIME RATHER THAN IMPOSING A SOLUTION UPON THEM.

TREATMENT SERVICES:-

THE TREATMENT OFFERED FOR OPIATE (HEROIN) USERS WAS PRETTY MUCH THE SAME AS IN THE UK, NAMELY SUBSTITUTE MEDICATION IN THE FORM OF METHADONE AND/OR BUPRENORPHINE. THESE TIED IN WITH THE GREATER AVAILABILITY OF DETOX AND REHAB BEDS SEEMED TO WORK FOR MOST OPIATE MISUSERS. SOMETHING THAT I CONSIDERED TO BE A BETTER SYSTEM THAN THE UK'S WAS ONE DRUG TEAM I VISITED (ACTUALLY WHERE THE DETOX CENTRE WAS) WAS THE FACT THAT THEY PROVIDED A PHARMACY DISPENSE SERVICE FOR CLIENTS WHO WERE NOT CONSIDERED SUITABLE FOR MEDICATION PICK UP FROM A COMMUNITY PHARMACY. THIS SERVICE WAS OPEN 24/7 364 DAYS A YEAR SO THERE WAS NEVER AN EXCUSE FOR A CLIENT TO SAY THEY COULD NOT PICK UP THEIR MEDICATION AS THE PHARMACY WAS CLOSED. ONE SLIGHT DISAPPOINTMENT FOR ME WAS THAT IN WA THE ONLY TREATMENT THEY OFFERED FOR CRYSTAL METH AND OTHER STIMULANT USERS WAS COUNSELLING, DETOX AND REHAB. IN THE UK, OR CERTAINLY IN MANCHESTER WE OFFER A NUMBER OF ALTERNATIVE THERAPIES SUCH AS MASSAGE, ACCUPUNCTURE, COGNITIVE BEHAVIOUR THERAPY AND SOMETIMES USE TENS MACHINES TO HELP.

SUMMARY:-

ALL IN ALL I FOUND MY TRIP A VERY INTERESTING AND USEFUL EXPERIENCE. SOME OF THE THINGS I HAVE BROUGHT BACK ARE A DESIRE TO CHANGE HOW DRUG TEST RESULTS ARE NAMED IN THE UK. HERE IF A TEST SHOWS TRACES OF AN ILLEGAL DRUG IT IS CALLED A "POSITIVE TEST" WHICH I FEEL HAS CONNOTATIONS OF SOMETHING GOOD WHILE IN WA IT IS CALLED A DIRTY TEST AND SIMILARLY A TEST SHOWING NO TRACES OF A DRUGS IN THE UK IS CALLED A NEGATIVE TEST WHILE IN WA IT IS CALLED A CLEAN TEST. I PERSONALLY FEEL THE AUSTRALIAN VERSION IS A LOT CLEARER AND LEAVES NO ROOM FOR MISINTERPRETATION. I AM HAVING DIFFICULTY IN GETTING MY COLLEAGUES TO AGREE TO CHANGE HOW WE NAME TEST RESULTS AS THEY FEEL THAT "DIRTY" IS JUDGEMENTAL. I MUST ADMIT I FIND IT DIFFICULT TO UNDERSTAND THAT ARGUMENT.

ONE OTHER THING WAS THE WHOLE DEDICATED DRUG COURT REGIME. I FEEL THAT THE SOONER THE UK INTRODUCES A SIMILAR SYSTEM THE SOONER WE WILL START TO DEAL WITH DRUG RELATED CRIME. I AM AWARE THAT SEVERAL AREAS ARE PILOTING DRUG COURTS BUT FROM WHAT I CAN DISCOVER THESE SEEM TO CONSIST OF MAINLY LISTING ALL DRUG RELATED OFFENCES IN COURT AND HAVING PROFESSIONALS AVAILABLE TO ADVISE THE COURT OF THE BEST WAY OF PROGRESSING THE CASE. I SEE THIS AS A FIRST STEP AND WHAT WE NEED IS A VERSION OF THE DRUG COURT REGIME. I APPRECIATE THAT IT IS TIME AND STAFF HOURS CONSUMING BUT SURELY IF

THE UK WANTS TO REALLY DEAL WITH ILLEGAL DRUG USE AND ITS CONSEQUENT OFFENDING BEHAVIOUR IT NEEDS TO LOOK AT SOMETHING AS INTENSIVE AS THIS IF ONLY INITIALLY FOR THE MOST RECIDIVIST OF OFFENDERS.

CONCLUSION:-

I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THE WINSTON CHURCHILL MEMORIAL TRUST FOR AGREEING TO FUND MY TRIP AND CAN ONLY APOLOGISE FOR THE LATE SUBMISSION OF THIS REPORT.

I WOULD ALSO LIKE TO EXPRESS MY APPRECIATION TO MY EMPLOYERS FOR GIVING ME THE TIME TO GO ON MY JOURNEY AND ESPECIALLY TO MY COLLEAGUE STEVEN MOFFAT WHO HAD TO COVER MY ABSENCE FOR SOME 9 WEEKS.

MY THANKS ALSO TO MY SISTER BARBARA AND HER HUSBAND ROD THAT PROVIDED ME WITH ACCOMMODATION WHILE IN PERTH AND FOR LISTENING TO MY GOING ON EACH EVENING ABOUT WHAT I HAD SEEN THAT DAY

FINALLY MY HEARTFELT THANKS TO MY FAMILY ESPECIALLY MY WIFE LYNN WHO HAS ALWAYS SUPPORTED ME IN MY CAREER AND HAD TO STAY AT HOME WHILE I VISITED AUSTRALIA, A PLACE SHE HAS ALWAYS ENJOYED WHEN ON HOLIDAY